

Tomato Container Gardening

**7 Easy Steps To Healthy
Harvests from Small Spaces**

Mary Verdant



Tomato Container Gardening: 7 Easy Steps To Healthy Harvests from Small Spaces

By

Mary Verdant

Copyright © 2012 by Angelico Publications

angelicopub.com

This book is designed to provide information and motivation to our readers. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged to render any type of psychological, legal, or any other kind of professional advice. No warranties or guarantees are expressed or implied by the publisher's choice to include any of the content in this volume. Neither the publisher nor the individual author(s) shall be liable for any physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or commercial damages, including, but not limited to, special, incidental, consequential or other damages. Our views and rights are the same: you are responsible for your own choices, actions, and results. Please use your best judgment in doing any activity and consult local traditions and experts before making any choices as to the activities you do.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication can be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission in writing from Angelico Publications.

[Introduction](#)

[Step 1: Find The Perfect Location For Your Containers](#)

[Step 2: Choosing The Best Containers](#)

[Step 3: Great Soil For Containers](#)

[Step 4: Water and the Perfect Tomato](#)

[Step 5: How To Select The Perfect Tomatoes For Your Garden!](#)

[Step 6: Avoiding Pests & Diseases](#)

[Step 7: Secrets of Maximizing Tomato Harvest](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[My Favorite Recipes](#)

[Appendix: Building A Self-watering Container \(Illustrated\)](#)

Other Best Selling Books By Mary Verdant

[Vegetable Container Gardening](#)



Introduction

Mmm. Delicious!

I remember as a child biting into a fresh tomato from my grandmother's garden. The lush smell of the warm tomato in my hand, the sweet, rich flavor of fresh tomato, that wonderful taste that store-bought can never have... I didn't think life could get much better!

When I left home, I lived in an apartment and bought tomatoes from the grocery store. They didn't even taste like the same food! I asked my grandmother why. "Mine were grown with love," she told me. That may very well be true, but whatever other reasons, all tomato lovers know that fresh tomatoes are just taste better than store bought ones!

Not only that, but they pack a larger nutritional punch. And how often can you say "delicious" and "good for you" when talking about delicious foods?

With home grown tomatoes you needn't worry about the inevitable bruising that they take at the grocery store. And you certainly don't have to worry about what pesticides may have penetrated the skin lurking inside, waiting for you to ingest it along with the tomato.

When you grow your own tomatoes you're not at the mercy of your local store's produce manager who decides only to stock one or two varieties (usually not your favorites!). Of course, in some ways it doesn't matter - all store bought tomatoes all taste like cardboard.

Imagine Having Ripe, Lush Tomatoes You Grow Yourself!

Wouldn't it be grand if you could grow your own tomatoes and enjoy that distinctive flavor of love? Wouldn't it be even better if you could serve these love -filled fruit to your family so your children can have those same marvelous memories?

Sure it would, but you live in an apartment in the middle of a major metropolitan area. Or you say it's impossible because your yard is the size of a postage stamp?

Despite these seemingly impossible conditions, you can still grow tomatoes, whether you have 20 acres, a tenth of an acre or no acreage at all!

Simple. It's called container gardening

But, you say, "I'm not in any shape to garden. How am I supposed to perform all the physical work that goes into preparing and maintaining these plants? My gardening days are over."

Not so. This same method that allows a person to garden in small spaces, also allows those who normally would be unable to garden enjoy this hobby.

It's true! Your age doesn't matter; your physical condition doesn't matter. There is far less labor involved than you normal would expect.

Growing tomatoes in containers breaks all the barriers - space, age, your health. Regardless of where you live, what your age or the limitations on you

physically you can still enjoy homegrown tomatoes.

I Thought I Would Never Taste The Joy of a Fresh Tomato Again!

At one time, I thought like you do now. Those days of homegrown tomatoes are gone forever. But as I continued my studies in urban horticulture (yes, I inherited my grandmother's love of growing), I discovered that I could live in my apartment and still grow tomatoes using container gardening. And yes, it's exactly as it sounds. You grow your plants, in this instance, tomatoes in a container of some sort.

I remember visiting a master gardener friend one day in her 7th story apartment. She brought me a beautiful, warm pungent tomato. "Taste it," she said. "Well, don't I need to wash it first?"

"No, it's organically grown. You don't need to worry about pesticides."

I bit into it and immediately memories of my grandmother's garden flooded my mind. I scrutinized the container and the plant, deciding that I could do the same thing in my apartment.

And I have been enjoying fresh tomatoes ever since. But now it's time to share my "secret" with you. And that's why I've developed this book. It provides you, step by step, everything you need to know to start growing tomatoes yourself - regardless of where you live!

Growing Tomatoes In Containers: Simple as ABC

In this book, you'll learn the ABC's of growing tomatoes in small spaces. And I promise you, all you need to do is to follow these guidelines and before you know it, you'll be plucking fruit off your own plants. And your children and spouse won't be able to get enough. You may even have enough to give some to family and friends. And won't they be envious - and thankful - when they taste the love.

What exactly does this book cover? The 7 Step Process includes:

1. Sun, wind and the basics of finding the best spot

2. Choosing the proper containers to optimize the growth process
3. Creating the perfect soil
4. Watering your plants
5. How to choose the perfect tomato plant for your needs
6. How to keep your plants healthy and happy
7. Harvesting fresh tomatoes

Consider this book your personal guaranteed system for growing fresh, delicious tomatoes.

Yes. Guaranteed. I know this process works because I've fine-tuned it to a system. I don't want you to get discouraged in your efforts. My first season or two of growing tomatoes the results were less than spectacular . . . even though I was a budding horticulture student. I thought I knew all the tricks. Obviously, there were a few I wasn't aware of!

Not only that, but using this awesome, no-fail system I've guided my family and friends through the identical process I'm sharing with you. And now they're all enjoying the fresh taste of tomatoes flavored with love.

It's a system that I not only perfected but one I personally guarantee. You have my word on that.

How To Use This Book

This book serves you best when you read it in its entirety to start. In this way, you get an overview and begin to even taste those scrumptious tomatoes.

Then go through each chapter individually to decide your personal next steps from assessing the location that provides the best sunlight to selecting those tomato recipes you've been yearning to make.

The process of growing healthy, delicious tomatoes packed with love - not to mention nutrients - is really quite easy once you know what is really involved. But you'll discover that for yourself when you follow these easy to use guidelines.

So why wait a second longer. Discover right now how you can enjoy the joyful taste of tomatoes grown with love.



Step 1: Find The Perfect Location For Your Containers

As excited as you undoubtedly are, before you actually stick a single plant in the dirt and begin the growing process, take a breather, step back and assess your resources. Examine exactly what you have in the way of environmental factors that will contribute to a successful tomato-growing season.

You already know you don't need a large space. You don't even need a flat space if you're considering upside down container gardening. In fact, there are only four requirements for growing tomatoes in containers: sunlight, wind, warmth and water.

As we go over these factors briefly, consider where your tomato plants would be happiest based on what they need.

Let's talk sun - and lots of heat. How much and what type of sun does your home receive? Your plants need direct sunlight. And at the very least six hours a day. Some master gardeners say eight hours are just enough.

Most people, when asked how much sun their home gets tend to overestimate. It would be a shame if you do this only to find your first foray into gardening less than successful. There is now a handy device that helps you get an accurate accounting of sun exposure, it calculates the amount of sun you receive. You can find these online just by searching "sun calculators" on a search engine of your choice (like Google or Bing).

At the very least, go online to find a calendar giving you the times of both sunrise and sunset in your area. Just type in sunset calculator into a search engine. This gives you an excellent estimate of the number of hours of potential sunlight your plants may receive.

If you don't want to get a sun calculator, put a piece of paper where you are thinking of planting your plants, and check every hour or so to see when it starts getting full light and when it stops. I know on my balcony, I thought I was getting 6 hours of sun, it always seemed sunny, only to find that in fact I was getting four and had to move my tomato plants to a different location.

Container Tomato Gardening: A Moveable Feast

Growing tomatoes in containers does give you a great advantage. If you discover the location you've placed your plant is too windy you can move it - at least theoretically. You may discover a container is too heavy to move, depending in its size, once you place the moist soil and plant in it. If you can move them, all the better.

Wind poses a danger because it may knock over not only your plants, but your containers along with them. But here's a quick tip you can use even before you get started. Weight down your containers. Before adding your soil mix, place a layer of gravel, pebbles or sharp sand on the bottom. You'll be amazed at how this anchors the container.

Wind can also be problematic for your watering schedule. Windy conditions can dry the soil out quicker. Be sure to be vigilant in checking the moisture content of your soil on windy days. This is especially true if you're staking your tomatoes.

Baby, It's Warm Outside

Your tomatoes not only crave sunlight but they crave warmth as well. Master gardeners advise not to plant tomatoes in soil that registers less than 55 to 60 degrees. This is the soil temperature, not the air temperature. Similarly, don't plant if the air temperature at night dips below 45 degrees.

But here's another tip you may want to keep up your sleeve. Several weeks before you plant, cover the soil with black or other dark-colored plastic. That'll not only keep the soil warm, but also generate more warmth. By the time you're ready to plant, you'll discover the soil is warm.

The temperatures, I've provided you are within a general range. You'll need to find a more accurate accounting for the kind or kinds of tomatoes you're planting. If the instructions aren't on the label of the seedling you've bought, ask your local garden supply staff.

If you're an eager, impatient gardener - and many of us are - you may want to "defy" this advice about the minimum night temperature, especially if it's

toasty warm during the day. You can do what many of us do, place your containers on a wagon or a cart and put them in the garage overnight or on colder days. If there's a will, there's a way to protect tomato plants!

I know your next question. About what time in the spring could I plant and be fairly certain a late frost won't hurt my precious tomatoes. I can't provide you with any generalizations. It all depends on where you live. But that doesn't mean you have to guess. There is something called a map of climate zones.

Technically, it's called a Hardiness Zone Map. This map divides North America into separate zones, based on temperature and the time of the year. Each zone is separated by an approximate ten-degree difference. Using this, you can get an accurate appraisal of when to plant. Simply click on this site to find your region: <http://www.garden.org/zipzone/>.

Step 2: Choosing The Best Containers

One of the joys of container gardening the variety of pots you can use to plant your tomatoes. And trust me, the choices have never been better! You can choose from all types of shapes, colors, material and many sizes. In fact, you have so many possible selections at your fingertips, it just may make you dizzy with delight. Or it just may frustrate you.

But you don't have to settle for just one type of container or one size. You can have a variety of pots and even grow bags around your home.

Most gardeners choose from among three sizes of pots for their tomato plants. They select pots that are large, at least five gallons, mid-size, approximately one to three gallons or hanging baskets.

Size Matters!

The size of container you choose depends on the varieties of tomatoes you're growing. This is probably the most important part of the decision-making process. But here's a secret I've discovered over the years: You can never, ever choose a pot that's too large. Even if you're growing types of plants which only require a one to three gallon container they'll thrive in the extra room of a five-gallon pot.

The most common mistake container gardeners make - especially those selecting pots for the first time - is to buy ones which are too small. Tomato plants have large root systems. Plant them in a pot that's too small and they'll get root bound. So if you must err, do so by purchasing a larger rather than a smaller one.

Terra Cotta, Plastic, Wood: So Many Choices

What should your containers be made from? That's a question I get asked all the time. Tomatoes can flourish regardless of the material the container is manufactured with. But each material has certain advantages - and disadvantages.

Terra cotta and clay are perfect for any setting. These materials just seem to blend in where ever you place them. These natural materials also allow for excellent circulation. By that I mean that both air and water move easily through them.

But, you do have to monitor tomatoes planted in these materials carefully, checking to ensure they have enough water. Plants tend to dry out more quickly in these pots. Containers made from these materials also crack when exposed to sudden changes in temperature. These containers will probably need to be replaced more often than those made of plastic or wood.

You may be eying the plastic containers you've seen in the local nursery or home-improvement store. No doubt about it, they are one of the most popular choices for growing tomatoes. Not only are these practical but they're relatively inexpensive. Unlike the terra cotta and clay varieties, plastic containers hold up well to freezing and the subsequent thaw.

Another distinction from the terra cotta pots, is the ability of plastic to retain moisture. You'll need to water your tomatoes less. And you can enjoy an amazing diversity in size, style and color. One challenge with plastic pots is that, frankly, they are ugly. In the appendix I'm going to give you some ideas on how to decorate your plastic pots so that they can actually become a creative showpiece in your garden.

If you're thinking of wood containers, think redwood, cedar or even cypress. These are most resistant to rotting. You'll want to avoid buying pressure-treated wood. The chemicals of the wood can seep into the soil and be transferred to your plant. One of the largest advantages of wooden containers is their ability to provide excellent insulation. But be prepared to pay the price for the beauty and warmth of wood. They do cost more than your average plastic pot.

While these are three of the most popular containers, you'll find as you browse these items, that containers can be made from just about any material imaginable. Don't be surprised to find containers made from fiberglass, pressed paper, concrete, metal and cast iron.

And if you really want to get imaginative, just look around your garage or

shed. Do you have an old wheelbarrow you're not using? You can easily turn this into a container for your tomatoes. The same can be said for old buckets you're not using and even garbage cans. Just about any material can house a tomato plant.

Many persons clean five-gallon buckets that drywall or paint came in for use as their containers for tomato plants. They simply create the necessary drainage holes using a hammer and a nail. Be careful though, don't use buckets that held any sort of toxic substance - it can leach into your soil!

Containers That Water Themselves!

It's true! You can now buy gardening containers which are self-watering. The conventional method of water is to pour water on the top of the soil, being careful with tomato plants not to get the leaves wet, and the water soaks down to the roots. In a self-watering container is stored in a reservoir at the bottom of the pot and sucked up by the roots as they need it.

The self-watering container is really two separate containers of roughly the same size. One is the planting container itself and the other the reservoir .



Container gardening requires that you water it more frequently than your typical garden plot. And this is doubly so for tomatoes which need quite a bit of water. In fact, they generally need to be watered daily, and in the hottest part of the summer, they may even need watered twice a day.

Let's face it, no matter how dedicated a farmer we may think we are - sometimes it just slips our minds. I know that, on more than one occasion, I have forgotten to water my tomatoes. Having a self-watering pot is also an excellent method to ensure that you don't overwater your plants .

One of the most popular of these is the patented Earthbox container. You can find it on the internet. The basic concept is simple enough that you can actually make a quite effective one yourself. I'll discuss this in more depth in Step 4. For now, just realize that this is an option - and an especially good one.

I build my own self-watering containers and the appendix has a detailed description with photos on how to easily build your own self-watering tomato containers.

Growing Bags, Anyone?

If none of those container ideas satisfy you, why not look into the alternative called a grow bag? Yes, it's a bag that you place your growing medium and plant into. It works in the same manner as a pot.

These are ideal for very limited spaces. The idea sprouted in the United Kingdom by gardeners who were determined to make the most efficient use of the very limited space they have.

Some of these bags are only a few inches deep, which may be problematic when growing tomatoes. If you've never grown tomatoes before, you're about to discover that its root system is complex, wide and long - and not extremely conducive to shallow soil.

Since the introduction of these bags into the United States, though, they've undergone a transformation. You can find several different styles as well as

sizes. And some of them are an ideal method of growing tomatoes with the space you have.

One of the first questions most individuals ask concerns the durability of the grow bag. The first inclination, given the amount of soil, is to think the bag rips easily. And indeed the way some of the bags are constructed they do rip fairly easily.

But if you buy those made from polypropylene and are double layered, you'll discover they can actually withstand several seasons of service.

The other question asked quite about is the frequency plants in the bags should be watered. Here the bags really excel. They're made from a material that resembles felt and breathes. And this is a good thing. Because of this any time you water it a bit too much, the water is actually absorbed by the bag instead of just running through a drainage hole.

Additionally, the felt fabric allows the water to transport the much needed nutrients throughout the soil to the plant. When there is far too much water, it simply soaks through the bag and leaves. It doesn't sit in the container drowning the roots potentially causing root rot.

If you recall, I did say that the smaller bags may not be able to sustain the root system of a tomato, but the bags are advantageous to the roots. The bag's special texture - as opposed to the smoothness of a plastic or terra cotta container - promotes what's called "root pruning." This is when the roots grow to the edge of the container, the bag "air-prunes" the roots. This means the roots stop growing when they reach the edge of the bag. In a hard-sided container the plant would become root bound.

But in a grow bag the roots instead begin growing new sprouts along the tap. This in effect means the tomato plant grows stronger and healthier.

If you're seriously considering these bags, then you really need to consider purchasing the highest quality you can find (and afford). This is one of those instances when you do 'get what you pay for.'

Grow bags can be purchased in several sizes, depending on the specific

brand you buy. There are two very high quality brands currently on the market. The first is made from Gardener's Supply. These bags are square with each side approximately 14.4 inches wide. The height of the bag is 16 inches and can hold 73 quarts - or 18.25 gallons.

The other bags, made by Eco-Friendly, are round with an 18-inch diameter and are 14 inches tall. These hold 60 quarts or 15 gallons.

Upside Down Containers

When you choose this next option of container gardening you are in a very real sense turning the gardening world on its head. Well, at the very least you're turning your tomato plants upside down.

Upside down containers are those that the plant is placed through a hole in the bottom of the container. It then grows down instead of up. The container is hung in a sunny spot. This approach to growing tomatoes has several advantages. For one, it's ideal for anyone with very limited space. You can easily hang your plants on your sunny patio or deck.

Another advantage is the obvious lack of staking these plants. Normally, part of the process of tomatoes is the pounding of a stake into the ground next to the plant to keep it standing.

Upside down tomato gardening also attracts less of the pests that seem determined to destroy your tomatoes.

Basically, there are three methods of hanging this type of container. It can hang from a wall, a ceiling or from a pole or a specially designed hanging system. You need to be careful when doing this though. You'll be surprised at how heavy a container is once it has five gallons of growing medium and a tomato plant in it.

Some hanging brackets are made to hold up to 50 pound containers. Your only concern then is to ensure that what you attach the bracket to can withstand that much weight.

You also need to choose your tomato variety carefully if you're considering

planting upside down. Not all varieties will produce well with this method.

If you're interested in this method, you needn't buy the latest and greatest innovation. This is another simple concept which you can create at home using large buckets you may already have stashed in your garage or shed. Check out the web site below to discover how easy it is to make your own upside down container.

<http://containergardening.about.com/od/vegetablesandherbs/a/UpSideDown>

Also, I was at Home Depot last week and found an upside down grow bag that was less than \$5.00. I'm trying it out to see how it works!

You now have a good idea of what type of containers you can use. As you're considering which ones are best for your situation, let's talk about the soil that's best for tomato container gardening. That's Step 4 of this easy-to-follow system.

Step 3: Great Soil For Tomatoes

You ensure the food your family eats nourishes them. You choose it carefully, knowing that good nutrition creates a healthy body.

Similarly, the food you feed your tomato plants should also abundantly nourish them. And that "food" can only reach your tomatoes if you give them the proper vehicle with which to deliver it - the soil. Few of us can walk out of our houses, dig in our garden to discover we have soil perfectly suited to planting tomatoes.

In fact, we really don't recommend including soil from your back yard for three reasons:

1. It generally doesn't have the texture required of good tomato growing soil.
2. It often comes complete with weed seeds and can have viruses and bacteria in it that will harm tomatoes.
3. We often don't know what has been dumped in our soil - it may contain toxins that we don't know about.

Healthy tomatoes require three things from soil:

1. Structure - as I've mentioned before, the tomato plant creates a large root system. The soil must be able to hold up the plant and provide the structure for it to grow, and grow, and provide you with large, juicy tomatoes.
2. Moisture - You don't want the water just touching the surface and running off. But neither do you want the water to linger too long drowning the soil. This would only cause damage to the roots - and eventually the tomatoes.
3. Nutrients - tomatoes love their fertilizer! The soil must be able to get

nutrients to the plant to keep it healthy and growing.

Soil is composed of three parts, sand, loam and clay. The right ratio of each needs to be in your garden soil for proper drainage. It's widely accepted among gardening that a sandy loam is the best medium. This soil is predominantly loam, but has enough sand and clay to hold it together.

Basically, you're looking for a growing medium that crumbles without falling apart . By amending your soil with the ingredient that's lacking, you can begin to turn that not-quite-ready for tomatoes soil into a highly efficient nourishing medium.

Now you can see why choosing the right soil is key to healthy plants. Not only is the soil the medium these nutrients travel, but the soil needs to retain the proper amount of moisture to make this happen. Lastly, the soil acts as a structure which holds up the plant.

Actually, I've discovered what I like to call a super soil that really isn't soil at all. It's a soil less mix. It's called Mel's Mix after the individual who first formulated it, Mel Bartholomew, author of the book, All New Square Food Gardening.

He recommends - and I enthusiastically agree - that you mix together equal amounts of the following:

- Vermiculite
- Peat moss
- Bagged compost

But don't use just any bagged compost. Make sure that it's blended from a minimum of five sources.

You may be tempted to skip this step and place your plants in a container filled with garden soil. Don't. Remember, there really are reasons - and good ones --- why I recommend this. First and foremost, your garden soil isn't sterile. It contains organisms that carry diseases that are just waiting for you

plants. Garden soil also has within it a variety of bacteria and fungi. Not creatures conducive to producing healthy plants.

When you use a potting mix you are assured that all aspects of this medium are already perfectly suited for the job. If you don't want to mix your own soil less soil - and many individuals don't - you can buy potting mix. I've found the best to be Miracle-Gro Potting Mix.

Fertilizing The Soil

Once you've selected the perfect planting medium (soil) for your plants, you still need to fertilize! There are quite a few types of fertilizers on the market, and a lot of arguments about which one is best of container tomatoes!

There are three basic ingredients in fertilizer. Measured by weight, the three ingredients will also be listed through the use of these numbers in this order: nitrogen, phosphorus potassium. You will probably see these abbreviated as N-P-K. The K, by the way, is the letter for potassium on the periodic table of elements.

The best best is to go ahead and get a fertilizer that is made especially for tomatoes. Your local garden center should have some, or you can find it online by searching for "tomato fertilizer".

You may also want to buy what's called a slow-release fertilizer. This means your plants receive the proper amount of nutrients spread over a specific time period. You don't have to worry about gorging them only to have them starve in a day or so. They'll receive a steady supply of food. Honesty, I use Happy Frog Tomato and Vegetable Fertilizer.

There are two words that are vital in the tomato fertilization process: little and often. This describes it perfectly. You should feed your tomatoes small amounts at a time, but do it with a definite frequency. In this way, you're also assured that your tomatoes are getting a continuous supply of essential nutrients. Slow-release does this beautifully.

It's best to fertilize our plants in the early morning or in the evening when it's not too hot. Avoid this task during the peak of the day or on days when

the temperature climbs above 90 degrees. Tomatoes have a difficult time digesting the nutrients in extreme heat.

Step 4: Water & The Perfect Tomato

Lush, delicious tomatoes. That's the goal. But you can't get that unless you water them regularly. Tomatoes grown in containers need to be watered more often than those in regular garden plots.

You'll find yourself watering them at least once a day - sometimes more depending on the circumstances. There are really several reasons for this. One could very well be the location of the containers themselves. You may have placed them under an overhang where they receive little or no water.

Or as the sun hits the pot, the container gets extremely warm and dries the soil out much more rapidly than it would in a conventional garden. But even if these two conditions didn't exist, you'd still find yourself watering your tomato plants frequently. The fact of the matter is that pots contain less soil, which prevents the plant from drawing as much as it needs into the root system.

Quite frankly, some of us have a difficult time remembering to water our tomatoes daily. And sometimes because of other commitments, it's impossible to water them more than once a day. This is where technology meets nature, creating a wonderful pair.

The Convenience Of A Container Watering System

I use a container watering system set on a timer. I set it and then forget it. I know that the system is going to take care of the needs of my plants. It's like watering on "autopilot."

You may decide you want to use this method too. It's easy enough to do. Basically, two types of container watering systems exist. One is the spray method; the other is drip irrigation. I don't suggest using spray irrigation for tomatoes. It sprays the water on the plants, getting the leaves wet. This increases the chances of attracting bugs and developing diseases.

I highly recommend the drip irrigation method for tomatoes. This system originally created to conserve water, does just that while it also serves as a

dependable source of irrigation for your plants.

In this system, a series of tubes deliver the water directly to the soil in the container which is then released at a specific rate prescribed. Depending on the type you purchase, you may have a container which is being watered at a rate of one gallon every hour. Not every container in your garden needs to be set on the same rate. Some plants will need more or less watering than others depending on their locations and the types of containers they're living in.

The real advantage of drip irrigation is its constant supply of water to your plants. Tomato plants are especially hungry. For them to grow healthy, they rely on that steady supply of water. When fed with this method, they actually absorb the water better. That means you're using less water.

Modern drip systems are available just about everywhere. If you're interested visit your local garden center or home improvement store. There'll be able to provide you with a kit that can water about twelve containers at once.

If you prefer, you can build your own drip system. It's quite easy to do. The key components in this project include, of course, the tubing which delivers the water from your spigot to the pots themselves. You'll also need what are called emitters, which actually disperse the water, a pressure regulator as well as a filter. I suggest you add to your list of components a timer.

Water-Holding Crystals

What if I told you that there a method existed in which water was actually held in the soil of your containers until your plant roots needed it? At that time then, the water was released and nourished your tomatoes.

It's true! And it's another case of technology and nature forging a beautiful - and fruitful - friendship. Known as Water Jelly Crystals, this method uses a water-absorbing polymer called hydrogel. Hydrogels absorb water then release them later. In a nutshell, these water crystals enhance the water-holding capability of your soil.

Also known as hydrogel crystals, these come in various sizes and shapes for specific applications. Consider this: one pound of these crystals can absorb nearly 35 gallons of rain water or up to 25 gallons of tap water.

You can use these granule-like substances either wet or dry. Hydrate them and you'll discover that they're still astonishingly small. Resembling a piece of gelatin, they're not larger than half an inch in diameter.

When you include these in your soil before you hydrate them, use no more than a half a teaspoon for each quart of soil. You need to remember that when the soil is watered, these granules will then expand greatly. I suggest you estimate that you leave about 15 to 20 percent free for the expansion.

For container gardening though, you probably would be better off to wet them before you place them in the soil. A half teaspoon of these crystals absorbs about a cup of water. An ounce soaks in nearly one and a half cups of water. If you use a pound of the dry granules you're looking at about 30 gallons of water being absorbed.

Once you mix the granules in water you'll need to let them soak for at least an hour to an hour and a half. Then you apply it to your soil at a ratio that's approximately one part hydrated crystal to four parts soil mix.

Your third alternative is a self-watering container. This differs from your standard growing pot in that it allows the roots to suck up the water at the bottom of the structure as it needs it.

Just like the irrigation systems we talked about earlier, you can either buy these commercially or make them.

Self Watering Containers

In essence, a self-watering container is really two containers of near equal size. The one is used as a reservoir to hold the water while the second is the actual planting container.



We have detail directions on how to do this in the [Appendix](#).

But not only is it easy on you, it's also extremely healthy for your tomatoes. This is a very natural way for them to drink and nourish themselves on their own schedule. It is far more efficient than watering them from the surface and hoping enough trickles down to the roots.

All this sounds great. And it really is. But you also need to be aware of two disadvantages to using this approach. The first is the stagnant water. It can attract mosquitoes. But you can counter this simply by adding a few drops of oil to the water.

The second disadvantage involves the sun and the plastic container. One of the characteristics of plastic is its tendency to get brittle when it's exposed to direct sunlight for prolonged periods of time. This means that on average your self-watering container may have a lifespan of three years maximum. So don't be surprised when you need to replace it.

The Earthbox

There's another exciting self-watering container you can buy that's called Earthbox. Not only will it continuously supply your tomatoes with water for several days, it can also automatically fertilize them too. You can buy these or you can make this type of container as well. If you want to see how easy it is to make this particular type of self-watering pot, just do a web search using the term "home-built Earthbox." You'll find many different sites and plans to build your own.

If you do decide to go the do-it-yourself route, just keep in mind you should avoid using materials that have any type of chemicals which could leach into your soil.



Step 5: How To Select The Perfect Tomatoes For Your Garden!

Your next step is a vital one. The actual choosing and planting of your tomatoes. You may be somewhat bewildered by the wonderful choices available to you. Don't be. Once you learn the language of tomatoes you'll find that you can maneuver through this maze like a professional.

The first thing you'll learn is that there are at least four different ways to categorize tomato plants, beginning with their genetic make up.

Hybrid vs. Heirloom

Hybrid tomatoes are a mix of two varieties of plants for the purpose of giving them specific qualities. They're usually developed so they can withstand disease, produce abundant amounts of fruit, and other qualities important to the commercial distribution of the produce.

If you talk to some gardeners, though, you'll discover that hybrids are

seldom bred to enrich their flavor. The tomatoes you buy from your grocer's shelf are hybrids for the most part. And now you can say that's the reason they taste like cardboard.

That's an overly critical comment about hybrids. Today many of them are being bred specifically to improve their flavor as well. So when choosing a type of plant don't ignore it just because it's a hybrid.

There is also some concerns that hybrids are Genetically Modified. I 've done some researh on this and it looks like most hybrids are just a cross between two other varieties. This may change over time.

The other genetic category is the heirloom tomato. As you might infer from what we've already talked about, this classification refers to strains of plants that have been grown for generations without any the addition of any other variety. They are, in essence, the purebreds of the tomato world.

Heirloom tomatoes are famous for their robust flavors as well as their glorious colors. You can buy these in shades of not only red and orange, but yellow, green, pink and even purple and black. The heirlooms described as purple, by the way, are more of a pinkish-brown. And those gardeners call black are really closer to a dusky red with green or brown shoulders.

Another difference between these two categories is the seed production. A hybrid tomato plant produces seeds that will not breed true and create new plants with the same quality of the parent plant.. The heirloom plants do produce seeds that you can save year after year and grow new plants with the same qualities.

Some names of popular hybrids include Brandywine, Cherokee Purple, Green Zebra (Why yes! It is green striped!), Stupice, and Yellow Pear. Popular heirloom choices include Sungold, Early Girl, Better Boy, Brandy Boy and Big Beef.

Determinate vs. Indeterminate - Bush vs. Vine

A second way of classifying tomatoes is by the amount of fruit they bear. A plant labeled as determinate or "bush" produces fruit for only several

weeks. After that, flowers blossom which halt its production. The sprouting of these blooms also causes the plant to stop growing in height as well. A tomato plant that's labeled as a determinate only grows to a certain height, then stops. This is often great for containers as these plants don't tend to need staking, and they only grow 3 - 4 feet.

Indeterminate, on the other hand, produces no terminal flower clusters, providing you tomatoes throughout the growing season - very often until that first frost hits. This type of plant does sprout a flower, but it's called a lateral flower which doesn't interrupt the growth of the tomatoes. This plant will also continue to grow taller and can grow from 6 - 10 feet. These often need staking or some sort of support.

Tomato Shape

Plants are also classified according to the shape of the tomato itself. This is regardless of whether it's a hybrid or heirloom, determinate or indeterminate. Your tomatoes fall into four broad shape categories. The first is called a globe, which is probably the one most people are familiar with. It's the most popular commercially-cultivated tomato.

There is also the Beefsteak, which is the largest of all the tomatoes. Next is the Paste tomato, which is a thick-skinned fruit. Not usually sold to be eaten, it's used in the making of tomato sauces. Then there's the Cherry variety. This plant bears the smallest tomatoes.

Finally, the last way tomatoes are classified is through the type of leaf it has. You're undoubtedly familiar with the leaf of a tomato (and as you continue your gardening journey will become even more so!). These varieties are in the group called regular leaf. But there's also a group called potato leaf. And yes you guessed it, the leaves resemble those of potato plants.

You might be interested to learn that both the tomato and potato are part of the same family of nightshade plants, so this resemblance might make a little more sense to you. By the way, pepper plants also belong to this family.

Which Plant Is Right For Your Container?

Now, you're waiting for some advice on which tomato you should plant. This would be so much easier if I could pick one or two varieties, tell you with confidence these are what you should plant. But I can't.

Many variables go into your decision, not the least of which include the climate in which you live, the amount of sunlight you receive and the specific containers you're using. The best first step to take if you've never planted a tomato before is to read through this book. Get a feel for what's really involved. Once you've done that visit your local garden supply store or your local nursery. Explain to them what you prefer and get their advice. Different plants obviously grow well in different climates. They can tell you what grows best in yours as well as what others in the area are growing. That will give you the best suggestions.

You'll also want to check out the American Horticultural Society's web site at: http://www.ahs.org/master_gardeners/ if you live in the United States and Canada. This is an excellent resource. It'll direct you to the best regional advice for growing different types tomatoes.

If you reside in the United Kingdom, there is also an equivalent site: <http://masterygardeners.org.uk/> which contains a wealth of local gardening suggestions. You'll feel as if you have a master gardening at your side throughout the entire growing season.

Top 10 Container Tomato List

While I can't tell you which tomatoes grow best in your region, I can tell you the most popular varieties are for container gardening overall. This at least gives you a starting point.

- Patio Princess
- Bushsteak
- Sweetheart of the Patio
- Marglobe

- Baxter's Bush Cherry
- Sweet Baby Girl
- Gardener's Delight
- Balcony
- Stupice
- Tumbling Tom Yellow

You can guess from a few of these names, like Patio Princess, Sweetheart of the Patio and Balcony, that they have been intentionally bred for container gardening. You may want to ask your local nursery about their popularity in your area. If they aren't suited for your region, your nursery attendants certainly will propose equivalents.

One of the criteria to keep in mind when you're making your choice is how you plan on using your tomatoes. Perhaps your goal is to grow big, juicy tomatoes for slices. You may prefer moderate-sized tomatoes to cut into your fresh salads.

Some individuals even grow the small round tomatoes specifically to take to work with them as part of their lunch. Still others grow tomatoes specifically for canning or for juicing. Be sure, when you talk to the staff at the local garden supply store, you mention your intent if they don't ask.

Choosing your tomato plant

One critical factor to your tomato growing success is choosing the right plant. Look for plants with a strong stem, no black spots or yellowing leaves, and no flowers. The ideal starter plant is going to be short, solid and leafy.

Getting Down and Dirty: Planting Your Tomatoes

Most gardeners do not grow tomatoes from seed. Certainly though this is an option. But I don't recommend this, especially if you're a first-time tomato grower. You'll have much better success when you buy the seedlings - the

small starter plants - and use these. In fact, this is the way most individuals plant their tomatoes - even experienced gardeners. Because of this, you may be limited in the types of seeds available.

You'll have better luck growing tomatoes purchasing seedlings. But even at this, there's a few little tricks to transplanting. Even if you're an old hand at transplanting flowers, you may want to check out the following steps for transplanting tomato seedlings to containers.

The first step, especially if you've had your seedlings growing inside for any length of time is a process called hardening off. It really sounds much more severe than it is. Its purpose is to ready the plants for the extended natural sunlight that's about to be a part of their life.

This is about a 10-day process. You set your plants outside for a few hours every day in order to acclimatize them slowly to the outdoors. Begin by placing them in what gardeners call filtered, or partially shaded, sun. Be sure at this point to protect them from any heavy breeze. You'll also bring these little ones back in every evening.

With each successive day, keep them outside a little longer while gradually exposing them to a little stronger light until they're adapted to full sunlight. When doing this, take extra notice of the soil. These plants will be thirstier when set outside than they were when left inside for the entire day.

Now you're finally ready to take them out of the seedling pot and give them a larger home in their containers.

Planting Your Seedlings

Take the plant, turn it upside down, gently of course, and then lightly tap the bottom of the pot. This loosens the dirt. Don't pull the plant from the pot; you may injure the root system by doing this.

If the tapping doesn't loosen and free the roots, then take a small trowel or an object about the width and shape of a butter knife (My mother always used a butter knife for this purpose) and carefully place it along the sides of the container and the dirt. This allows you to gently remove the plant.



Check for Root Wrap Around!

Once you have the plant freed from its original container, take a good look at it. You're looking for something that many gardeners call "root-wrap-around." This occurs when plants are left in the container too long. The root system grows so much that it begins to literally wrap around the pot horizontally instead of growing downward. If any of your plants suffer from this, then you'll need to correct this.

Gently pull the roots from the bottom center of the plant. You'll want to do this on all sides of the dirt.

Once you've corrected this, go to the intended new home of the plant and dig a small hole in the center. The opening must be large enough to allow for about half of the depth of the plant to be buried. Yes, part of the stem will be under the soil. It will, with time, be part of the root. This makes your plant stronger and healthier.



Now place the root system in the hole. Gently pat the potting soil around the plant. Yep, that's it. You're almost finished. But at this point just take a moment, stand back and congratulate yourself. You began this venture thinking you didn't have a green thumb. Look at you now!

Your final steps, after you've finished patting yourself on the back, is to water the plant (and you can probably already see the advantage of a watering system of some kind!) and then place it in the optimum location. I'm sure you've got some good ideas.

You've completed one portion of your gardening adventure. Your next step as you water and watch your babies grow is to keep them happy and healthy. That's what the next chapter is all about.

Step 6: Avoiding Pests & Diseases

Your fledgling tomato plants love fertilizer. You'll hear gardeners call these plants "heavy feeders." This is what they mean.

When you buy fertilizer, you'll find three numbers on the bag indicating the ratio of the three important macro-nutrients. We've discussed this briefly in a previous chapter. Specifically, these inform you of the nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium content of the mix in that order - always.

The first number, the nitrogen content, is important for you plants - especially in their younger stages. This nutrient provides exactly what they need for them to grow and for healthy foliage. As they age, though, they'll require less nitrogen. Excessive feeding of nitrogen triggers vine growth at the cost of the production of the fruit.

Phosphorus promotes the growth of both flowers and fruit. Finally, potassium builds strong stems as well as healthy root systems.

For your young plants, it's best to use what's called a balanced ratio, one in which all three numbers are equal. You could even use a formula that contains a little more nitrogen. Once the blossoms appear, though, you should switch to a fertilizer with less nitrogen and more phosphorus.

Here's a hint that many gardeners don't realize. Start the fertilization process one week prior to your planting the plants in the containers. Then fertilize again when you actually plant them.

Cage 'Em And Stake 'Em

With the help of your fertilization techniques, you'll find your tomato plants grow rapidly. Before you know it, you'll be thinking about either staking or caging your plants. Of course, you won't have to worry about this if you're practicing upside down container gardening.

Yes, I know this sounds like a bit of work. But, believe me, the small effort it requires yields great rewards. Depending on your stake style, you may be

able to do this at the beginning of the season and then forget about it.

As you might have already figured out, indeterminate tomato plants - those that grow and produce fruit throughout the season - are those most in dire need of some type of support.

Your alternative to staking is to allow the plants to spread out. Space is probably at a premium already since you're container gardening. In addition to taking up less space, staking or caging makes sense for several other reasons. It encourages your plants to grow vertically. Because of this the plant receives better air circulation which helps to prevent the development and spread of disease.

And your plants will thank you by providing you with bigger, healthier tomatoes, not to mention that they'll start producing them earlier in the season. If those reasons weren't enough, the harvesting of your fruit is much easier when your plant is staked than if it were spread out on the ground.

Of course, no process is without its disadvantages. Staking is no different. It adds to your maintenance a little, as well as increases your costs some. Let's face it, you'll have to invest your time to stake the plant, tie it and train it to grow upright. Not only that but now you're faced with pruning it as well.

During your first year of planting, the process adds to your costs. You'll have to buy the needed material. But, once you have them, you can use them for several seasons.

Your staked tomatoes, additionally, require more watering and preferably mulching as well. Tomatoes grown upright are more susceptible to the wind and the development of sun scald. The exposed soil just dries out quickly. And it's for this exact reason if you do stake, it's wise to add a top layer of mulch.

When you go to purchase staking supplies, don't be surprised to be presented with several options.

You'll find stakes for your plants. This is probably the method that comes to mind immediately. These are posts or poles that you insert into the soil

next to the plant. Then you tie the branches to these for support.

Cages come pre-made or already formed as cylinders. They surround the plant and in the process support it.

If neither of these appeals to you, you can purchase a trellis. These are wire or even rope dropped down from a line extended between posts. Your tomatoes then climb it.

Finally, you can also buy spirals. This is made from heavy gauge steel. It gives your plant support by growing upward on a twisted coil.

Prune 'Em

Many novice gardeners do everything right but fail to prune their plants. They don't know how beneficial it is not only to the health of the plant but also the maximization of the crop yield. Yep. Pruning can get you more tomatoes! Not only that, but they'll be more flavorful as well.

For the growing efficiency of your plant, you'll want to prune some of these side stems, also referred to as suckers, off. In this way, there's more nutrients for those branches that are left. Pruning is essential because if you allow the branches to grow, they soon develop into a stem, producing their own blossoms.

Doing this means the nourishment creates healthier fruit. It also helps to prevent disease. Side branches have the tendency to spread. This makes your plant more vulnerable to diseases.

It's best to nip a sucker off while it's still young and tender. You can do this very easily. Grasp the base of the sucker with your thumb and forefinger. Pinch it or bend it back and forth. Be gentle with it. Eventually it will snap off. You've just performed what's called simple pruning.

It's better, by the way, to use your fingers in pruning the young suckers than a knife or other sharp objects. The wounds created by the pinching heal quicker than the cut wounds.

You'll also want to take notice where you prune. It's best to prune below the first fruit cluster.

As the plant grows, you may notice that the lower leaves begin to yellow. Pinch or prune these as well. This helps to deter disease. It also helps to improve the overall appearance of your plant. But most of it, pruning the yellow lower leaves means your plants energy is being channeled to the production of fruit.

Pruning, is essential if you're staking your tomatoes. But you need to be careful. Some new gardeners tend to prune a little too much in hot weather. This can trigger sun scald. You'll also want to be careful how much you prune if you're growing an indeterminate variety of tomato.

Keep 'Em Disease Free

It's a fact of life. As hardy as tomato plants are they are vulnerable to a variety of diseases and disorders. While you can't keep them safe from all the problems, knowing some of the problems that may crop up will help you extend their life and health.

One of the most troublesome diseases for gardeners is late blight. This occurs in the face of cool, wet weather conditions. If severe enough it can actually kill your plants. You'll recognize it by the color brown. Brown areas on fruit. On the stem. Even on some of the leaves. This is an infectious disease. You need to pull those plants affected, wrap them tightly in a plastic garbage bag and dispose of them. Whatever you do, don't compost them back into the soil.

Damping Off

This disease is carried by the soil. It can be transmitted simply by watering your plants. The water splashes up onto the stem. The cause of damping off is a fungus which eventually makes your plant collapse. This disease can be prevented, at least in part, by using a sterilized soil-less seed starting mix. Then you must be careful in the watering of your plants. This is why bottom watering, as in the self-watering container systems is awesome. It removes much of this worry.

Blossom-End Rot

Technically, blossom end rot is not a disease, it's a condition. It occurs when tomatoes don't receive enough water. Just as overwatering can cause cracks in tomatoes, under watering produces this problem.

And its name is an apt description of what occurs on the plant. The rot begins at the blossom end or the bottom of the tomato. If it continues, it can actually consume nearly half of the fruit. The portion of the fruit unaffected is edible.

Some varieties of tomatoes are more vulnerable to this condition than others. Cherry tomatoes are seldom bothered by it. Plum tomatoes, though, like to Roma are more at risk.

These are just three of the most common problems facing tomato gardeners. Others include Catfacing, sun scald, cloudy spot, and dodder. Actually to gain a true knowledge of the possible dangers your tomato plants may face, consult this web site: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/tomatoproblemsolver/>. It's a comprehensive, extremely accurate guide to recognizing tomato diseases, disorders and conditions.

Those Little Buggers: Controlling the Pests

Everyone loves tomatoes. But when it appears that you have to fight to be the first to enjoy them, you might have a problem. If those little buggers, insects and other creepy, crawly things sample your crop before you, there's a problem. But you can control them when you know some of the pests that are most likely to try to stake a claim to your hard, earned fruits.

Probably the best known of these is the aphid. You can tell when the aphids have discovered your tomatoes because the leaves will be curling and turning yellow. You may also notice that the growth of your plants is stunted.

Additionally, if any of the leaves are shiny, this could be an indication of what's called a honeydew, excrement that's both shiny and sticky the aphids leave as their calling card.

While annoying, they're easily enough controlled with an insecticidal soap. It may be a bit tedious but it's certainly worth the effort. You wash the leaves - yes individually - with the soap. Follow the instructions on the product you've purchased, but for some infestations you may have to apply it twice a week.

You may also want to use a spray. You can find a good one at your local nursery or garden supply store. If you need assistance, the staff there should be more than happy to help you find exactly what you need.

Another common tomato pest is the insect thrip. The name may be comical, but the effects on the fruit are anything but. This bug is tiny and can be found in colors ranging from green to brown. He can be a danger because he's a carrier. He can take a disease from one tomato plant and give it to another.

You can spot the handiwork of a thrip when the symptoms of tomato spotted wilt disease appear. When I say the thrip is small, I mean so small you really can't see them. Other signs that they're visiting include blackened dead-looking spots on the tops of your plants. You may also notice streaks of a dark color or even black down the stems.

Just like with the aphid, thrips can be beaten by using an insecticidal soap. With this garden pest, it's almost a sure bet you'll have to apply the soap at least twice a week. You may also want to try a spray that controls and eradicates them. Again, check with your local garden supply store.

Another common pest you should be aware of even before you begin to garden is the tomato hornworm. He's been called by many gardeners as an "absolute foliage eating machine."

If not stopped, this worm will eat everything on your plant from the leaves to the fruit itself. While these guys are hard to spot, it is possible to detect them. It may take a little work. You'll have an indication that they're around when you see black dropping that they leave behind. When you see one, you'll know him immediately. He's the one with the green, reddish horn on his rear end. (Honest!)

Best Friends Forever: Companion Planting

Another way to control actually prevent outbreaks of these attacks is through a technique called companion planting. This is when you place two plants side by side. One of the plants has characteristics that either deters the pests that are attracted to its companion or adds some nutrient to the soil encouraging the other's growth.

If your tomato plants are under attack by aphids, consider planting them alongside nasturtium as well as chives, onions and garlic. The last three plants, as a matter of fact, are effective against many tomato pests, because of their distinctive aroma.

Borage when placed with your tomatoes help to keep the tomato hornworm at bay.

Try planting marigolds along with your tomatoes. They repel nematodes, who also like to munch on your fruit. According to some gardeners you can even take the flowers at the end of the growing season, chop them and then till them right into the soil. Poof! Effective and organic pest control. The odor of the flower also intimidates other pests as well.

Now you're well on your way to experiencing a successful growing season. Your next challenge - harvesting the fruits of your efforts. Don't worry. I'll be with you every step of the way.

Step 7: Secrets of Maximizing Tomato Harvest

You are now prepared for the time you've worked all growing season for. It's time to begin plucking tomatoes from the vine and enjoying their robust taste. Congratulations!

But exactly how do you know the perfect time for picking a tomato? This is easy, regardless of the variety or color of the fruit you're growing.

First, examine the skin of the tomato. If it has turned from the previous dull, matte surface to a glossy, slightly shiny surface, your tomato is well on the road to ripening. Before you pluck it though check out the color. Whatever its natural color is, the fruit should be a deep version of it. And finally feel it, as you touch it, it will give only slightly. It should be tender, but not soft.

If all these elements are present, it's time to take it off the vine and place it on your dinner table! Enjoy!

Fooling Mother Nature

While you have to face the inevitable - the end of the tomato season - you don't necessarily have to accept the timing of it. Yes, you can fool Mother Nature. And it's not that difficult to do.

One of the best ways to extend your tomato season and enjoy it little longer is through some smart, savvy pruning. No doubt you've been pruning throughout the season. If you've ever grown roses, you've been told not to prune as fall approaches. Whatever you do, don't apply that knowledge to your tomatoes.

As the days grow shorter and colder, prune your plants. This helps them to better receive the warm sunshine required for healthy fruit. Actually, the sun itself doesn't encourage the maturing of the tomato. It's really the warmth that doing the work. With fewer branches, your fruit receives better exposure and gets warmer.

But there's another trick of the gardener's trade you can also use. This one involves the encouraging those last tomatoes of the season to ripen before it's too late. Prune the flowers from the plant that have not yet set fruit. Then, dissolve some Epsom salt in water and use this to water your plants. This will spur the fruit still on the vine to ripen.

Here's one more method you can use to harvest as many tomatoes as possible as the end of the season approaches. The purpose of this practice is to let your plants know, loud and clear, that fall is here and the fruit needs to mature.

Take a trowel or other suitable digging implement and dig about one foot from the stem. You'll want to dig straight down. This is the only time you don't worry about the roots. In fact, the whole purpose of this exercise is to cut them. Do this in approximately three separate places along your container.

This, in effect, limits the amount of water the plant can drink. This shock to its system will cause the plant to begin the necessary preparations for winter. Specifically it will cause the fruit to ripen.

The Party's Over

Yes, you've picked all the tomatoes you can off the vine for this season. The end is definitely here. As a container gardener, you have a few duties to take care of before you can close up shop. The largest one is emptying and cleaning the containers themselves.

You'll want to empty the containers of all soil at the end of the season. But you don't want to throw it on your compost bin or some gardening spot. You don't know what's lurking in that soil mix. It could be nematodes or any other kind of small barely seen creature. If you recycle this soil, then you'll only be starting off whatever you grow in it next season at a severe disadvantage. Why expose fresh plants to garden pests purposely? Besides, the plants have already depleted the soil of the majority of its vital nutrients. Just toss the soil.

Your next step is to clean the containers themselves. Wash them

thoroughly with soapy water. When you rinse them, use a ten percent chlorine blend solution. After this, you'll want to mix the containers yet a second time, this time with plain water. The second rinse ensures no bleach lingers.

You have several winter storage options available to you, depending on the types of containers you've used. Non-porous containers - the metal, plastic or glass ones, for example - can live in an unheated garage or shed all winter. They can also be kept in the basement.

You might want to think twice about storing them outside. Sure, they'll withstand the cold, but you'll just have to clean them again at the start of the following season. Why create twice the work?

Clay and terra cotta pots are porous. Once you've cleaned these, you'll need to bring these in. They need to be protected from the cold temperature. They have a tendency to crack when it gets below 32 degrees.

So you've done all of this but you still can't let the season fade? Are you already cringing at the thought of eating store-bought tomatoes? Believe it or not, you can still enjoy the delectable taste of fresh tomatoes whether there's frost on the pumpkin or a foot of snow outside. Here's how. Grow indoor tomatoes.

They're known as windowsill tomatoes. Granted they aren't as large as the beefsteaks you've been growing. In fact, these little guys are no larger than a U.S. quarter or a half dollar. But they're definitely packed with flavor. Of course, they're not slicing tomatoes. The purpose of these is to turn your winter salad into a taste fest.

One of these varieties, Pixie, Patio, Toy Boy, Tiny Tim or Small Fry, fits perfectly in a six-inch pot. You can also use larger one and plant two in it. These varieties are also easier to grow from seed. That's exactly how you're going to do this in fact.

Plant the seeds into clean starter mix, making sure they're at least a quarter of an inch deep. You'll water them after planting the seeds. Allow them to germinate.

When the plants sprout to about three inches, transplant them into potting soil. Allow them about two weeks in their new home before you begin to fertilize them.

Ensure they receive enough water continuously. But just like their larger brothers and sisters, you don't want to over water them.

That's it! When the plant booms, you can encourage production by using your finger and gently tapping the stem and a few of the branches. In effect you're moving the plant just enough to encourage them to pollenate. You may notice a small "cloud" dropping from the flowers. That's the pollen itself.

Be sure to turn these plants periodically as they sit on your window sill so all sides receive their fair share of light and warmth.

Then just wait and enjoy fresh tomatoes through the winter. Once the plants are done producing fruit, cut them off at the base. This soil mix you can save for future transplants. It's also perfectly fine to toss the spent plants on the compost pile.



Conclusion: Getting Started!

If you've always want to grow tomatoes but felt you didn't have the space, you now know space is relatively inconsequential. If you've always wanted to experience the fresh taste of home-grown tomatoes, but didn't know where to start, now you have a fine starting point.

This is it. Our time together is complete - at least for now. I know you'll return to this book throughout the growing season, though. This book has introduced you to the essentials of tomato container gardening. It's a primer of sorts that can be your constant companion all summer long.

From assessing your resources for the growing season, to choosing the containers, to mixing your soil, you can now start the process. You've also learned about these "heavy feeders," how they crave water and fertilizer. But more importantly, you've learned how to respond to their cravings.

Sure, I understand, you feel like you still have a few things to learn, but you now know enough to get started successfully. Thanks to your new knowledge your first year of growing tomatoes will not only be tasty, but it'll encourage you to start a second season. And it just doesn't get much better than that.

If you find this hobby exciting and interesting, this is really only the beginning. They'll be no holding you back. You'll seek out every reference book you can find. You'll increase your knowledge about tomatoes and the growing process exponentially.

But, I can't emphasize this enough. You have enough information to get started. And you now know where to go for additional help. Don't be afraid even in mid-season to visit your local garden supply store with any questions or concerns.

Before you start your new hobby, you may want to leave through the pages of this book again, double checking certain facts, adding a little more information. However, you decide to begin doesn't really matter. What matters is that you do begin. You'll never regret it. Guaranteed.

Nothing was ever accomplished without taking the first step. Don't be afraid to step out. It's much easier than you think. And not only will you be rewarded with fresh, luscious tomatoes all summer long, but you'll discover a peace of mind that only "playing" in the dirt can bring.

So what are you waiting for? It's time to choose your tomato varieties and your containers. Tomato season is upon us!

My Favorite Recipes

Here is just a very small sampling of my favorite tomato recipes. Fresh tomatoes make every recipe better. I hope you enjoy them !

Fried Green Tomatoes - With Flair

Ingredients

5 green tomatoes, sliced 1/2 inch thick

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

2 eggs, lightly beaten

12 fluid ounces, beer

1/2 cup oil for frying

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 teaspoon garlic powder

Directions:

Mix the flour, black pepper, red pepper and garlic powder with the 2 eggs and beer. Stir until it resembles the texture of pancake batter. Place the oil in a medium-hot skillet. Coat the tomato slices with the batter. Fry them for approximately five minutes on each side, or until they're golden brown. These taste best when they're eaten hot.

Double Tomato Bruschetta

Ingredients

6 Roma tomatoes, chopped

1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil

3 cloves minced garlic

2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

1/4 cup olive oil

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1/4 cup fresh basil, stems removed

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 French baguette

Directions:

Place the oven on the broiler setting.

In a large bowl, combine the fresh and sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, vinegar, basil, salt and pepper. Let this sit and the flavors mingle for at least 10 minutes.

Cut the baguette into slices of about three quarter inch. Arrange these on a baking sheet in a single layer. Broil the bread for one to two minutes or until slightly brown.

Evenly spread the tomato mixture over the bread slices. Top this with the cheese. Broil this for about 5 minutes or until the cheese is melted. Enjoy!

Super Easy Salsa

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups diced Roma tomatoes

1 avocado, peeled, pitted and diced
1 (11 ounce) can whole kernel corn, drained
1 1/2 teaspoons minced jalapeno pepper
1 (4 ounce) can sliced black olives, drained
3/4 cup diced red onion
1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon salt

Directions:

Mix together corn, olives, tomatoes, onion, red pepper, and jalapeno pepper in a large bowl. Gently fold in diced avocado, olive oil, lime juice, and salt.

Mix corn, olives, tomatoes, onion, red pepper and jalapeno pepper. Fold in diced avocado, olive oil, lime juice and salt. That's all there is to it. Now it's time to enjoy!

Fresh Tomato Appetizer

Ingredients

2 tomatoes, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon capers, drained
1 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced

1 (7 ounce) jar roasted red peppers, drained and julienned

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

1/2 teaspoon dried basil

1 pinch dried oregano

2 cloves garlic, minced

6 tablespoons olive oil

Crushed red pepper to taste

Directions

Mix basil, parsley, oregano, capers, garlic and olive oil together.

Arrange mozzarella cheese slices and tomato slices in alternating layers. Top this with the roasted red peppers.

Take the herb and olive oil mixture and drizzle over this. Cover this. Chill for at least 30 minutes. Bring out and sprinkle crushed red pepper. Enjoy! It really is super easy!

On a serving platter, arrange mozzarella cheese slices and tomato slices in alternating layers. Top with roasted red peppers. Drizzle with the herb and olive oil mixture. Cover and chill in the refrigerator 30 minutes before sprinkling with crushed red pepper and serving.

Appendix: Building A Self-watering Container

If you decide to create one yourself, one of the most popular ways to do this is to use two five-gallon containers.

What you'll need:

2 X 5 gallon buckets

1 lid

1 pipe for watering

1 small container (we use yogurt containers)

1 drill

1 box cutter / exacto knife

1 saw (could use drill if using PVC pipe)

1 sharpie (or good eye for estimating)

Here's a quick overview:

One pot (the top pot) will be have a hole in the bottom of it with a wicking basket holding soil. The bottom pot will have water in it (from the pipe). You pour water into the pipe. It is wicked up through the wicking basket into the main body of soil.





1. Take the small container and drill holes in it.

Family Owned Since 1968
 Belmont Hill Farm is located in picturesque Sonoma County about 50 miles north of San Francisco. We have been raising award-winning natural goat milk products for over 40 years and are dedicated to producing the best, healthiest, best processed and most natural goat milk product available anywhere.

Family Owned Since 1968

about 50 miles north of San Francisco. We have been raising award-winning natural goat milk products for over 40 years and are dedicated to producing best-tasting, local processed and most natural goat milk products available anywhere.

America's
Favorite
Goat Milk
Yogurt

2. Draw a line on the bottom of one bucket that is smaller than the top of the small container.
3. Cut out that line with the exacto knife.



4. Measure and cut a hole for the pipe



5. Drill holes in the bottom of the container for aeration



6. Cut your pipe ends so the water can get from the pipe to the bottom of the container
7. Cut a medium circle in the lid - this will be used to keep moisture in (optional)
8. Now take the other bucket and put the first bucket (the one with all the holes) into it and see where it ends. Drill a hole just under where the top bucket ends. This is for overflow.
9. Place the small container inside the inner bucket and the pipe in as well.



10. Fill the small container with soil
11. Water the soil
12. Plant your plant (remember that you put a good chunk of stem in the soil)



13. Decorate with paint, stained glass, or other materials. Make sure that anything touching the soil directly is non-toxic.
14. Enjoy!!!

Table of Contents

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Step 1: Find The Perfect Location For Your Containers](#)

[Step 2: Choosing The Best Containers](#)

[Step 3: Great Soil For Tomatoes](#)

[Step 4: Water & The Perfect Tomato](#)

[Step 5: How To Select The Perfect Tomatoes For Your Garden!](#)

[Step 6: Avoiding Pests & Diseases](#)

[Step 7: Secrets of Maximizing Tomato Harvest](#)

[Conclusion: Getting Started!](#)

[My Favorite Recipes](#)

[Appendix: Building A Self-watering Container](#)